



**Discover the Real West Virginia Foundation
2013 Broadband Summit
Remarks as Prepared for Delivery
November 4, 2013
Senator Jay Rockefeller**

Good morning, welcome, and thanks to everyone for coming today. Your participation in these Summits plays a very important role in our work to advance broadband in West Virginia.

Our last broadband summit was in 2009. In the four years since then, it's amazing how much we have accomplished together. During that summit, I predicted that we were on to something big. It turns out I was right.

At that time, less than 72 percent of West Virginians had access to broadband. Today, 91 percent have access. This fantastic progress is the result of many people in this room, and I thank you for your dedication to this effort.

But even though we have made great strides, our work is not done. As you know, I believe every West Virginian deserves access to the promise of broadband. So, today, we're here to talk about how we can make this happen.

Our keynote speaker from earlier today, FCC Commissioner Jessica Rosenworcel, knows just how critical it is that we reach the goal of universal connectivity.

I also want to thank our attendees. All of you here today know how broadband access can amplify innovation and economic growth in West Virginia. This summit is designed to give you tools and ideas to use technology in even more effective ways.

Early on, we could see the potential of high-speed Internet to improve our schools, our small businesses, and our communities.

And, when all is said and done, these joint efforts will bring more than \$500 million in public and private broadband investments to West Virginia.

I'm incredibly proud to have played a role in both the government and private sector investment in the state. I have aggressively pursued every telecommunications provider for 16 years to build out their networks in West Virginia.

To their credit, those companies have responded, with millions of dollars in investments to build wireline and wireless broadband networks throughout the state.

I have also been aggressive in pursuing grants and funding for West Virginia to fill gaps left by the private sector. Nowhere is the result of this public investment more apparent than BTOP grants.

While the rollout and implementation of BTOP in West Virginia hasn't been as seamless as we'd hoped, no one can argue that West Virginians don't stand to benefit enormously from expanded broadband availability when the project is completed.

Unfortunately, many in Washington believe that now is the time to cut back on investments in critical infrastructure like broadband. But the reality of broadband deployment, particularly in remote areas, is that it takes public support to reach these locations. Right now, we need to be investing more, not less, in our communications infrastructure to reach that goal of ubiquitous broadband availability.

I want to do everything possible so that all West Virginians are on the right side of the digital divide. Thanks to the close collaboration we share between the state, the federal government, and invested stakeholders, we are closer than ever to making this a reality.

Right here in Morgantown, the super Wi-Fi network that WVU is building holds substantial promise since it can go places regular Wi-Fi cannot. It's exactly the type of innovative thinking that rural communities will need to overcome difficulties caused by the state's terrain.

And then we have Google Loon, a project that defines thinking "out of the box." I'm excited to hear more about Google's plans for Project Loon. But if it's a success, and connecting every West Virginian to high-speed Internet requires floating balloons into the stratosphere, then that's what we will do.

Our universities, small businesses, schools, first responders and hospitals are already thinking ahead and making the case for how they would use this improved access to broadband technology.

A perfect example of this is in our schools. By all measures, the bi-partisan E-Rate program that I created with Senator Olympia Snowe in the 1996 Telecom Act has been a resounding success. The number of classrooms connected to the Internet has gone from 14 percent in 1996 to more than 93 percent today. That's something we should all be enormously proud of, but we cannot rest on our laurels.

The demand for better broadband connectivity and technology in our schools and libraries continues to increase. That is why I'm so committed to strengthening and expanding this program.

I was thrilled earlier this year when President Obama became the latest partner in this effort. And I know Commissioner Rosenworcel shares this as a priority for the Federal Communications Commission.

We have given more and more West Virginians access to a stronger future since our first broadband summit in 2006. Broadband contributes to a growing economy and expanding businesses. It strengthens our first responders in crisis and emergencies. It helps students reach new educational opportunities, and it improves healthcare.

Those are all things we want for our state and our people. And they are all within reach if we remain committed to giving every West Virginian access to broadband.

Thank you again so much for being here today. I'm proud to stand here as your partner in giving every West Virginian access to the power that comes with a high-speed Internet connection.

Now, I am honored to introduce you to Mohammad Gawdat (Ga-dot), Vice President of Google.

He's here to tell us about a very exciting project that holds enormous promise for delivering Internet access to rural communities like those here in West Virginia. Welcome to Morgantown, Mr. Gawdat (Ga-dot).